

of special interests in favor of the people's interest because all of us were elected to represent the people first.

This bill is not a perfect bill, and we will work this week to refine and improve the bill. For example, I would like to see the denial of Federal pensions to Members of Congress who are convicted of certain crimes. I am proud to support an amendment with Senator JOHN KERRY which would do just that in this legislation. The likes of former Congressman Duke Cunningham and the bribery that occurred in that particular case should be the grounds for the denial of pensions to Federal Congressmen and Congresswomen.

I would also like to see greater transparency in the committee process, and I will offer an amendment on that issue later this week.

I also believe it is important to note that this bill touches on ethics in the executive branch. We know there has been so much focus in the public debate on how this deals only with the legislative branch of Government, but, in fact, this legislation will also end up creating a new program of Government independence and integrity in the executive branch.

It will do so by extending the revolving door for very senior executive branch employees from 1 to 2 years and by expressing the sense of the Senate that any applicable restrictions on congressional branch employees should also apply to the executive and judicial branches of Government.

We need to make sure that every branch of Government has strong ethics rules. I look forward to working with my colleagues to accomplish that goal in the coming months. It is my hope that the relevant committees address these issues in the near future.

Let me make a comment about this issue.

The fact is, the House of Representatives is dealing with ethics as their first issue, and the Senate is dealing with ethics as our first issue. We are taking a very important step in the right direction, but at the end of the day, it is the loss of confidence of the people of America in their Government in Washington as a whole that we need to take a look at, and the issues we deal with here are only focused largely on the legislative branch of Government, but there are also a whole host of issues in the executive branch of Government that should require us to take a hard look at what it is that all of our Government officials are doing.

At the end of the day, our goal should be to try to make sure the integrity of Government extends to all aspects of the Government and that the confidence of the people we all represent extends to a confidence in all of our Government. The only way we can do that is to make sure we have the highest ethical standards that apply to the Congress as well as to the White House and to the executive branch of Government.

It is my sincere hope that the committees of jurisdiction, including the

Committee on Governmental Affairs and Homeland Security and other committees that will look at this issue, will also help us bring about that kind of cultivation with respect to how we look at integrity in Government.

It isn't enough for us to clean out only a part of the barn in Washington, DC. I am a rancher and a farmer in terms of my upbringing. When you go in, you clean out the whole barn. Our effort is to clean up Washington, DC, and, if it is a committed effort on the part of both Democrats and Republicans, we need to make sure we are cleaning out the whole barn.

Finally, it is important to make sure that we all recognize this bill is moving us forward in the right direction in a number of ways. It bans all gifts, and it bans meals and travel paid for by lobbyists. That is a ban that did not exist before this context. It is an important step in the right direction.

Second, it requires public disclosure within 3 days of any hold placed on a nomination or on legislation. During the 109th Congress, Democrats and Republicans who were part of legislation we were trying to get through could not find out who was putting holds on legislation. That is not the way to do business. If a Senator has a problem with a bill, if they want to put a hold on a bill, they ought to tell their colleagues what it is they have a problem with, what is the substantive issue that causes that Senator a concern that requires him or her to put a hold on a bill.

This is a very important procedural positive step forward for this institution, and I look forward to strongly supporting that part of the bill.

Third is closing the revolving door between Congress and K Street by extending the cooling off period of Members of Congress and stiffening the rules regarding lobbying activity by senior staff members. It is an important rule that allows us to close that revolving door which has been a part of Washington, DC, for far too long.

Fourth, this legislation requires that conference reports be made available to the public at least 48 hours before their consideration by the Senate. That way not only be the public of the United States of America but also the Members of this body will have an opportunity to study what is in the legislation and will be able to react so we do not enact legislation that is passed in the dead of night without people knowing on what they are voting.

Fifth, the bill requires a list of earmarks in a bill, the identity of the Senators who propose them, and also identity of their essential Government purpose.

For the last year, we have talked about earmark reform and the importance of moving forward with changes in the earmark process, which has been a part of this body probably since its inception, but making sure we know where those earmarks are coming from, who is proposing them, and what

is the essential governmental purpose that is being addressed by that particular earmark.

It is essential for us to be able to tell the American public what it is we are doing with taxpayers' dollars. I fully support the earmark proposals that are put forth in this legislation.

As a member of the Senate Ethics Committee, I am also pleased to join with my colleagues in supporting the aspects of the bill that would do the following:

First, it would require the Ethics Committee of the Senate to report on an annual basis with detailed statistics on the number of alleged violations and the status of complaints that are pending before the Ethics Committee of the Senate.

Second, it would require the Ethics Committee that it conduct mandatory ethics training not only for Senators but also for all of our staffs who are affected by the decisions and the activities of our office on an ongoing basis.

And, third, that we as a Senate move forward in the creation of an independent commission to make recommendations on the effectiveness of congressional ethics rules and lobbying disclosure laws.

It is important to note that these changes are necessary, not because there is something inherently wrong or dishonorable about the process of petitioning the Government. They are important and they are necessary because the American people have lost faith in their Government and because our Government should be doing more to have a Government that is transparent and a Government that is responsive to the business of the people.

I commend the leadership, Senator REID and Senator MCCONNELL, members of the Rules Committee, my colleagues and friends from California and Utah who are the managers of this bill, and members of the Governmental Affairs and Homeland Security Committee for their work. This is very important legislation that is taking an important first step in restoring the faith of the American people in the integrity of their Government.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator withhold the quorum call?

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Yes, if the Senator will withhold the request for a quorum call, Mr. President, I note that it is almost 12:30 p.m. I ask that the Senate recess until 2:15 p.m.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under previous order, the hour of 12:30 p.m. having arrived, the Senate stands in recess until the hour of 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:27 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mrs. MCCASKILL).

LEGISLATIVE TRANSPARENCY
AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT OF
2007—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 30 minutes of debate with the Senator from Connecticut, Mr. LIEBERMAN, and the Senator from Maine, Ms. COLLINS, to be recognized for 15 minutes each.

The Senator from Utah is recognized.

Mr. BENNETT. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, I know the order provides for Senator LIEBERMAN to go first, followed by myself. Since Senator LIEBERMAN has not yet arrived on the floor, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to begin. When Senator LIEBERMAN arrives on the floor, I will yield to him and then reclaim my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, today the Senate once again considers significant legislation to reform ethical practices and lobbying practices. Any sense of *deja vu* among my colleagues is understandable, for the bill before us, S. 1, is identical to the bill passed by the Senate by a vote of 90 to 8 in March of last year. That bill was the bipartisan product of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration. Because it never became law and because the issues that it addressed have only grown more troubling, the bill stands before us reincarnated but still very much needed.

The recent elections took place in the shadow of far too many revelations of questionable or even downright illegal conduct by Members of Congress. In reaction to those scandals, the American people sent a clear message to Congress that they had lost confidence in their Government. You may ask, Why does it matter? Why does it matter if the American people have confidence in their Government officials? It matters because without the trust of the American people, we cannot tackle the major issues facing this country. As long as our constituents are convinced that the decisions we are making are tainted by special influences or undue influence, then we simply cannot accomplish the work of this Nation.

I think it is appropriate that the first bill that is brought before this Chamber to be debated and considered is one that would reform the lobbying and ethics rules to increase disclosure and to ban practices that might be called into question or create an appearance of wrongdoing. We need to assure the

American people that the decisions we make are decisions of integrity, in which their interests are put first.

It is important to remember that the conduct of most Members of Congress and their staffs is beyond reproach. I believe the vast majority of people serving in the House and the Senate are here for the right reason. They are here because they care deeply about their country and they want to contribute to the formulation of public policy they believe will improve the lives of the American people.

The same can be said for the conduct of most lobbyists. In fact, lobbying—whether done on behalf of the business community, an environmental organization, a children's advocacy group, or any other cause—can often provide Members of Congress with useful information and analysis. That information and analysis aids but does not dictate the decisionmaking process.

Unfortunately, today the word “lobbying” too often conjures up images of expensive paid vacations masquerading as fact-finding trips, special access the average citizen can never have, and undue influence that leads to tainted decisions. We cannot underestimate the corrosive effect this perception has on the public's confidence in the legislative process.

One of the most important functions of the bill before us is to increase transparency, make it evident what is going on, how our decisions are made. As Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once noted, “Sunlight is the best disinfectant.” That, indeed, is the premise of this bill. It calls for greatly increased disclosure. It provides, for example, for a searchable, accessible public database where information on lobbying contacts and filings will be maintained and disclosed. It requires far more detailed disclosure of lobbyist activities in more frequent filings under the Lobbying Disclosure Act, and it ensures that this information is made readily available to the public via the Internet. The knowledge that the public will be able to scrutinize in detail the activities of a lobbying firm and contacts between Members and lobbyists will help to provide much needed transparency in this whole area. In addition, the enhanced disclosures will allow citizens to decide for themselves what is acceptable and what is not.

This bill also contains some needed reforms of earmarks. Too many times an earmark—the designation of taxpayer dollars for a specific purpose—has been included in the final version of an appropriations bill, or another bill, despite the fact that it was never discussed or debated in either the Senate or the House. By requiring that any earmarks in legislation disclose the name of the Member of Congress who proposed the earmark and also requiring an explanation of the essential governmental purpose of the earmark, and by making this information available on the Internet, this legislation will shed sunlight on the source of and the

reason for earmarks and allow them to be fairly evaluated.

I go through a very rigorous process when I decide to press for earmarks. I make sure there is community support, I review them in depth, and I am going to be very comfortable having my name attached to earmarks that I propose. In fact, I hope then that will help my constituents know I am working very hard for a project with which I agree.

It is not the process of earmarks per se that is a problem. The problem is when earmarks are sneaked into the final version of legislation without public debate, without a vote, without any consideration, and no one is sure where the earmark came from, who sponsored it or, in some cases, even who the beneficiary is going to be. That is the problem. That is what this bill would cure.

The enhanced disclosure in this legislation not only applies to the activities of lobbyists but to our own activities as well. I am pleased this legislation takes steps to eliminate the practice of anonymous holds on Senate legislation. This occurs when a Member notifies the cloakroom that he or she wishes to block a piece of legislation from coming to the floor and yet does so anonymously. I can tell you as someone who has had to deal with anonymous holds time and again, it is very frustrating when you can't find out who is holding up your legislation, why they are holding it up, and you cannot begin to resolve whatever the problems are. The hallmark of this body should be free and open debate. A process that allows a secret hold to kill a bill without a word of debate on the Senate floor is contrary to that principle.

The bill also includes some important provisions to slow the so-called revolving door problem, where Members of Congress and high-ranking staff leave their jobs in the Senate or the House one day and then turn around and lobby the institution they once served. Once again, the limitations in this bill get to the heart of the image problem here and help to ensure the integrity of our decisions.

Many of our former colleagues have become lobbyists. There is nothing wrong with that. But there should be a cooling-off period before they come back.

I notice my colleague from Connecticut has now arrived on the floor. Through the Chair, I ask my colleague if he wants me to finish my statement or if he wants to do his now, since he was first in the queue?

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Madam President, to my friend from Maine, it is an expression of the partnership we have had over the years on the committee that the hearing in our committee went until 2 o'clock so Senator COLLINS was able to get here before I was. If she will please finish her statement and I will go after her.

Ms. COLLINS. I thank my colleague from Connecticut.